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FOURTH PART

AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL LIFE

In the first volume of this work, I have tried to give a description /21
of the Social Life of the tribe by depicting its customs in relation to the individual, communal and national life. In the second volume I shall consider its Mental and Spiritual Life, its Literature and Music, its Religion, Magic and Morality. The Agricultural and Industrial Life will afford a transition from the one to the other of these subjects; this belongs primarily to the social manifestations of the tribal life, but the imagination displayed by sculptors, weavers, potters (or rather "potteresses") brings it also into relation with the mental. I do not however pretend to draw a sharp line of distinction between these two domains, as the mental life is reflected in the social customs, and the social idea strongly dominates the mental life of the tribe.

CHAPTER I

Agricultural Life

A. THE LAND AND THE NATIVE SYSTEM OF LAND TENURE.

1. *The nature of the soil.*

Considering that the Thongas dwell in the South of Africa, a /34
part of the world which is generally rocky and sterile, Nature

134 has favoured them to no inconsiderable extent as regards the soil of their country.

The coast belt is an ancient ocean-bed, and consists of dunes of white or reddish-brown sand, extending from the South-West to the North-East; between these dunes are basin-shaped hollows, at the bottom of which are ponds of stagnant water.

The pond in the hollow.

The hillocks rarely reach a greater elevation than 150 feet above the sea level (120 feet above the level of the lakes). The sand on the dunes is naturally quite unproductive, but the vegetation which has managed to develop there during past centuries, and the forests, which are fairly dense in certain spots, have gradually deposited a thin layer of soil, and this, when mixed with the sand and watered in due season by the rains, is capable of producing abundant crops. The hollows *(shilangwe, mu-ovi)* (1) are hardly more fertile than the dunes, although their continuous moisture

(1) For linguists, I indicate the class to which Native names belong. See the explanation of classes or genders, Part V. Chap. I. *Mu-ovi* are the prefixes of the singular

is favourable to the growth of certain plants. But by the side of 134
the sand *(tjfunye)* and the hillocks *(shitshunga)*, here and there, is 137
found a sort of black earth, containing a large proportion of vegetable detritus, in which maize, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, etc. thrive splendidly. *Nyaka* is the name given to this black soil : it is found at the foot of the hills which run from Lourenco Marques in the direction of Morakwen, and extends for a distance of some fourteen to eighteen miles. Several small springs rise at the bottom of this gentle slope, and tend to form a curious marsh, covered with beautiful tropical growths, of which gigantic palms *(mimale)* are the most striking. These are found in forests [136]
covering hundreds of acres, with an impenetrable undergrowth of ferns, enormous rushes and evergreen shrubs : magnificent palm groves, where apes, wild boars and large storks find a safe retreat.

Between this marsh of primitive mud and the hills extends 133
the arable tract of nyaka. There the fields are lovely ; maize can 134
be grown all the year round. In other places the nyaka is parched and dry, as in the valley of the Lower Nkomati, from the point where it leaves the Lebombo hills to the elbow of Magule. Here the annual overflow of the river deposits on the low-lying plains a fertilising slime, as is the case in Egypt. It is strange to see, during the winter, tufts of grass which were carried down by the stream, months before, caught in the branches of the trees and suspended some 15 to 20 feet above the ground!

The sand of the coast belt is replaced in the hinterland of Matjolo, in the low level between the Nkomati and the Bila plain, etc. by another kind of soil called *hundjuni*. This is a reddish earth containing much sand, but much finer and more fertile than the sand proper.

On leaving the coast belt we reach the Lebombo and Longwe hills, which are composed of a hard reddish porphyraceous stone. Further West, a broad plain extends from the Lebombo to the Drakensberg Mountains, in some places consisting of a greyish or brownish clay, in other regions very dry and stony. The foot

and plural of Cl. 8. Where a noun begins with *shi*, it belongs to Cl. 7/8-pi, with *ti* to Cl. 8-tin, with *shi* to the Class 10-noun. As a rule nouns will be given in their singular form.

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Phot. P. Berthoud.

Mimosa palustrosa in the marshes near Lourenço Marques.

of the Drakensberg is very fertile, as water flows abundantly from the mountain gorges. Some rivers, however, on reaching the Low Country, dry up entirely, at least during the winter time.

The soil of Spelonken is of a similar nature and very well watered. So the Thongas, who settled in Zoutpansberg, found there a soil which was, in certain respects, more favourable to agriculture than their sandy dunes or their hundjusi on the Coast. 134

Such is Mother Earth for the Thongas. They call it *misaba*, the plural form of nsaba, grains of sand. This word plainly shows that they come from sandy regions. For them the earth is a collection of grains of sand.

II. *Native System of Land Tenure.*

The Native population, taken as a whole, is a very sparse one. Let us consider the Ronga territory, for instance: 100,000 in a territory which may be estimated at 5000 square miles ; this gives a population of only 20 per square mile. The country is, however, very unequally peopled. Natives will only settle in spots where water is found, and, the sand dunes to which I have previously referred being exceedingly dry, they mainly inhabit the slopes of the hills and the immediate neighbourhood of the marshes already described. 162 311 361

To confine myself, amongst the Rongas, to the region in which I have principally travelled, that is to say the neighbourhood of Rikatla, the villages of Nondwane, which extend along a somewhat narrow strip (800 yards wide by 5 miles in length), stretching from the border of Mabota as far as Morakwen, contained in 1880 a population which I should estimate at about 1100 (1). This gives over 350 inhabitants to the square mile. Taking everything therefore into consideration, it may be confidently asserted that the country can easily support its population ; in fact it could support one three or four times as large.

It is important to bear all these circumstances in mind in order to be able properly to appreciate the Ba-Ronga laws relating to landed property. 423

(1) This population has very much diminished since the Ronga Portuguese war in 1894.

C. UTENSILS.

Nature, which has provided the Ba-Ronga with skins of animals for clothing, and with poles, reeds, grasses and fibrous barks for their habitations, has also favoured them with several exceedingly useful trees of which they have not been slow to take advantage. Of these the most valuable is the *milala* palm, *(Hyphaene crinita)* used for nearly all basket-work ; next comes the *nkuhlu (Trichilia emetica)* whose wood is particularly serviceable for all descriptions of carving. She has also deposited in their plains beds of clay, of more or less desirable quality, which they use for making pottery. I shall begin with the latter. 824

I. *Pottery.*

An excellent clay is to be found at Shibindji, in the neighbourhood of Lourenço Marques, a district close to Morakwen, and the people of this place — they are the same who abstain from eating any animal liver (I. p. 364) — are the potters who supply the whole country. They are said to be the masters (benyi) of the art. But clay is found in many other places, in Shifukundju, Mpatshiki, etc. It is said that the clay of Muweri, near Lemon Island, on the Lower Nkomati, is even better than that of Shibindji. So the art of the potter does not belong to a single family, and is not hereditary. Any one may learn it and practise it. Pottery amongst the Thongas is essentially woman's province. Is this because earthenware utensils are principally used in the kitchen, where woman's sway is paramount and indisputed? Possibly ; in any case it is so. 134 323 323

Let us suppose then that the mother of a family wishes to renew, or to add to her stocks of pots, large and small. She starts out for the marshes, picks up in the well-known hollow several clods of clay and returns to the village carrying them on her head. No one salutes her : everyone pretends not to see her, 323 727